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THE HISTORY OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

Christians interested in prophecy must often have wondered how and when the interpretations now widely accepted originated. Mr. Filmer traces the subject from early times to the beginning of the present century.

It was early agreed by post-apostolic Christians, that the four empires foretold in Daniel chapters 2 and 7 were those of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, for thus far prophecy had been fulfilled. But as to the future, Irenaeus, about A.D. 180, quoted Daniel as saying that "The end of the fourth kingdom consists in the toes of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar, upon which came the stone cut out without hands" (*Against Heresies*, V,xxvi,1). He also said that "the ten toes are these ten kings among whom the kingdom shall be partitioned" (*op.cit.* V,xxx,4). Thus he identified the toes of the image in chapter 2 with the horns in chapter 7, an assumption unsupported by the interpretation given to Daniel.

In the fifth century Jerome taught that the feet and toes represented the Roman empire in his own day; "For just as there was at first nothing stronger or hardier than the Roman realm, so also in these last days there is nothing more feeble, since we require the assistance of barbarian tribes both in our own civil wars, and against foreign nations."¹ This served only to perpetuate the view that the legs and feet of the image represented two successive stages in the history of the Roman empire.

Regarding these prophecies the post-apostolic church was much influenced by Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2 on "The Man of Sin" (AV), or "Man of Lawlessness" (RSV) which they identified with the little horn in Daniel 7. The Thessalonians evidently expected the return of Christ at any moment, but Paul corrected them by pointing out that other prophecies, such as Daniel 7, must first be fulfilled. So he wrote, "That day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2: 3-4). Most of the early fathers

understood the temple of God to be the church, for the Greek word here is not *hieron*, but *naos*, which Paul habitually used when speaking of the church (e.g. 1 Cor. 3: 16f. etc.).

Now concerning the appearance of the Man of Sin, Paul goes on, "Do you remember that when I was still with you, I told you this? and you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way" (v.5-7). Thus Paul taught that there was a restraining power which must first be set aside before the Man of Sin was revealed. The Thessalonians knew what this was, for Paul had told them, and exhorted them in this same chapter to "Stand firm, and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth, or by letter" (v.15). Whatever errors the church may have made on other matters, here we may expect tradition to throw light on what Paul meant; in fact we have no other means of finding out.

Tertullian had no doubt on the matter: "What obstacle is there" he wrote, "but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon its own ruins" (*On the Resurrection*, ch.24). Jerome held the same view, and John Chrysostom explained that Paul could not speak more plainly, "For if he had said that after a while the Roman empire would be dissolved, they would immediately have overwhelmed him as a pestilent person, and all the faithful, as living and warring to this end" (*Homily on Thessalonians*). Augustine confirmed that this explanation was widely held in the church. (*City of God*, XX, 19).

Thus there are good grounds for believing that Paul taught orally that the Restraining Power was the Roman empire. But to this the church added the notion that this empire would first disintegrate into ten kingdoms, that the Antichrist would arise from its ruins, and reign for three years and a half, when the Second Advent would follow. Although the Roman empire has long ago passed away, these expectations were never fulfilled. One can only conclude that they were based on false assumptions.

The basic error was that the church took Paul's words to mean that the Man of Sin would appear only after the Roman empire had been *destroyed*. He did not say that - he said taken "out of the way" (v.7). This cannot refer to the final destruction of the empire by the Turks in 1453, for that would contradict Daniel 7: 11, which says "I looked because of the sound of the great words which the horn was speaking. As I looked, the beast was slain, and its body destroyed." This shows that the little horn was first to arise and speak its great words before the Roman beast was destroyed. It follows also from this that the little horn cannot be a single individual, but a succession of persons,

or an institution such as the papacy, because it must have been revealed before the Roman empire passed away in 1453, but, according to Paul in 2 Thess. 2: 8, is not to be destroyed until the Second Advent.

The Reformers

The corrupt practices of the Papacy, such as the sale of Indulgencies, led to the Reformation, which divided Christendom into two camps. The Protestants found encouragement in their interpretation of prophecy, namely that the little horn of Daniel 7 was a symbol not of a personal Antichrist, but of the Papacy. It followed that the time period in verse 25 could no longer be three and a half years, but had to be interpreted on the scale of a year for a day, making it 1260 years. There was, however, no agreement on when it began or would end, and opinions differed on many other details. What concerns us is when and how the theory first arose that the little horn denoted the Papacy.

In the year 1071 the Byzantine emperor Romanus was defeated and taken prisoner by the Turks at the battle of Manzikert. In 1072 the Turks invaded and conquered most of Asia Minor, and established there the Sultanate of Rum. This marked the end of the Roman empire as a major power. At that time the popes were the puppets of the Holy Roman emperors, but in 1073 Hildebrand became pope under the name Gregory VII. He soon threw off the yoke of the emperor Henry IV, and established the general principles on which the super-power of the Papacy was later built.

During the next hundred years a fierce struggle for power ensued between the popes and the German emperors, until in the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216) the Papacy claimed supreme authority over all the world. "What power or potentate in all the world is comparable to me?" said one pope, "who have authority to bind and loose both in heaven and earth."^{3a} "If those things that I do be said to be done not of man, but of God, what can you make me but God?"^{3b} asked another. John Fox published many pages of such boasting in the 13th century canon law in his *Acts and Monuments* under the heading "The Image of Antichrist exalting himself in the Temple of God above all that is called God."

Also in the thirteenth century the foundations of the Inquisition, as an instrument for persecuting dissenters, had been laid. It was in this sequence of events that Eberhardt, arch-bishop of Salzburg, saw the fulfilment of the prophecies. About the year 1240, in the course of a hostile exchange of epithets between the pope and the German emperor, the latter had called Gregory IX the Antichrist, and Eberhardt, at a meeting of bishops, expressed the opinion that "Hildebrand, one hundred and seventy years ago, first laid the foundations of the empire of Antichrist

under the appearance of religion."^{2a}

Concerning the popes he said, "Those priests of Babylon alone desire to reign...He who is servant of servants desires to be lord of lords, just as if he were God...He changes laws, he ordains his own laws, he corrupts, he plunders, he pillages, he defrauds, he kills - that incorrigible man whom they are accustomed to call Antichrist, on whose forehead an inscription of insult is written: 'I am God, I cannot err.' He sits in the temple of God, and has dominion far and wide."^{2b} For this he was excommunicated, so little was heard of his views until the time of John Wycliffe more than a century later.

Between 1378 and 1417, there were two rival popes, one elected by the French in Avignon, the other in Rome. With these two publically calling each other Antichrist, John Wycliffe had little to fear when he declared they were fulfilling Paul's prophecy, or Daniel's vision of the little horn. But he was vague about the time period, regarding a prophetic "time" as indefinite, and symbolic of a long period.^{2c} Walter Brute later adopted the year-day interpretation for all other prophetic periods, but failed to show how the period in Daniel 7: 25 could be applied to the Papacy. In his opinion, "A time, times and half a time signify twelve hundred and ninety years."^{3c}

Military campaigns against the Albigenses in the fourteenth century, followed by similar attacks on the Waldenses and Huguenots from 1488 onwards, were seen by the Protestants as the fulfilment of the little horn making war with the saints (Dan. 7: 21). They were, nevertheless, faced with a problem when it came to applying the time prophecy.

Later, however, it was realised that the period began when the saints were "given into his hand" (v.24), which meant when the whole church was first officially placed under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. Two Roman emperors had decreed that the Roman bishop was head of the church, namely Justinian in 533, and Phocas in 606. Although Thomas Brightman (about 1600) and Dr. Cressner (in 1689) favoured Justinian, most preferred the later date, and it was not until 1813 that W. Cunningham published evidence to show that Phocas in 606 did no more than confirm Justinian's earlier decree.⁴ With each of these different views on when the 1260 years began, there were corresponding lists of the ten kingdoms supposed to exist when the little horn arose. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, it was generally agreed by Protestants that the Papacy was the little horn of Daniel 7, and that it had appeared among ten kingdoms after the fall of the western empire in 476.

Following Cuninghame's demonstration that the declaration of Phocas in 606 was of secondary importance, most leading exponents of prophecy came to agree with the earlier view of Brightman and Cressner. Meeting at a series of annual conferences at Albury Park in Surrey from 1826 to 1830, they expressed the opinion that the present Christian dispensation would be terminated by a series of judgments during which the Jews would be restored to their own land, and that these judgments would culminate in the Second Advent which would be followed by the Millennium. Regarding the 1260 years, they agreed that this commenced in the reign of Justinian, and ended at the French Revolution.^{2d}

The Jesuits

In order to check the progress of the Reformation, and refute the Protestant interpretation of prophecy, the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, was formed by the Romanists in 1540. Thus Ribera published a commentary on the Apocalypse about 1590, giving the Roman Catholic viewpoint, while at the same time Cardinal Bellarmine was producing his lectures against the so-called heretics. These expositors insisted on accepting "the common opinion of the ancients" that there was going to be a personal Antichrist who would reign for a literal three and a half years. Since there had been popes for far longer than that, it was argued that the Pope could not be Antichrist. Furthermore, because the Roman empire had never been divided up into ten kingdoms according to the demands of prophecy, the Antichrist had not yet come.

Bellarmino pointed out that when the city of Rome fell in 476, the succession of Roman emperors continued in Constantinople, but he contended that when the Turks took that city in 1453, there still remained the Holy Roman Empire in the west. He declared that "by the marvellous providence of God, when the western empire fell, which was one of the legs of the statue of Daniel, there remained the whole empire in the east, which was the other leg. But since the eastern empire was to be destroyed by the Turks, as now we see done, again God raised up in the west the former leg, that is the western empire through Charlemagne, which empire endured up to now."^{2e} Following the extinction of the Holy Roman Empire during the Napoleonic wars, this theory has now become obsolete.

The Historicists Discredited

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the Reformers' interpretation of prophecy was subjected to a series of attacks which ultimately led to its rejection by the greater part of the Protestant church.

1. S.R. Maitland

In 1826 the Rev. S.R. Maitland published "*An Enquiry into the Grounds on which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and of St. John has been supposed to consist of 1260 Years.*" He followed this in 1829 with a *Second Enquiry* of the same kind in which he answered his critics.

He first attacked the year-day interpretation by questioning the meaning of the Hebrew word *shabua*, translated week in the Seventy Weeks prophecy. While agreeing that the predicted period was one of 490 years, he made it appear that the word translated weeks was the plural of seven, and therefore could mean seven of anything, just as the word dozen means twelve of anything. Since in Daniel 9 it evidently meant seven years, there was no need for a year-day interpretation, and if not here, there were no grounds for it anywhere else.

Concerning *shabua*, he said it was the "invariable practice" of sacred writers to express time only in days, months, or years, except when they used *shabua*. The inspired writers, he said, never used *shabua* or any other word to signify a week, except in certain cases (p.7-9). Upon examination, his list of exceptions included every occurrence of that word in the Bible. And since it is a basic principle that the meaning of a word is to be determined solely from its usage, and since elsewhere in the Bible *shabua* invariably means a week of seven days, it must mean that, and not seven years in Daniel 9, and so requires interpretation.

Maitland's next argument was based on the "seven times" period of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in Daniel 4. "Here it is admitted" he says, "that Time means a *year*, and therefore we might naturally expect that three times and a half in chapter 7 should mean three years and a half." (p.13) It is true that most of the earlier Reformers had taken a "time" in Daniel 4 to mean a year. But already in 1823 John A. Brown had suggested that the story was an allegory in which the king stands for the whole series of Gentile rulers, and that the period was one of seven times 360 years. He gave this as 604 B.C. to A.D. 1917, when it would end in a "period of blessedness."⁵

Later historicists followed a similar interpretation. Thus Dr. Grattan Guinness predicted in 1886 that 1917 would be a momentous year for the restoration of Israel. Today, following the publication in 1956 of the Babylonian account of the subjugation of Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar in December 604 B.C., we can now confirm the precise fulfilment of this time prophecy on the basis that a "time" of 360 days signifies 360 years. Thus history itself has refuted Maitland's second argument.

In his *Second Enquiry*, Maitland asserted that the year-day principle was altogether unknown during at least the first twelve centuries of the Christian era. He said that some Reformers, with more zeal than knowledge, had determined that "as the Pope did not suit the terms of the prophecy, they resolved that the terms of the prophecy should be so interpreted as to suit the Pope" (p.77). In a footnote he added "I have not seen the mystical interpretation of the days in the works of any writer before the time Walter Brute...about 1390" (p.78).

This only shows how little Maitland knew of his subject. Two centuries before Walter Brute, the year-day interpretation had already been given much publicity within the Roman Church itself, as Dr. James Todd confessed: "A strange thing it is" he said, "But no less strange than true, that the modern doctrine of the prophetic days for years ...which has been employed for the purpose of adapting the prophecies of the Apocalypse to the Church of Rome, should be found to have originated in the bosom of that Church...I allude to the celebrated Joachim, founder of the Florensian order at the close of the twelfth century." (p.453) He then quoted some recent essays which said that Joachim had taught that the period of three times and a half, or twelve hundred and sixty days, signified no less than 1260 years." (p.458)

Even Joachim was not the first, for E.B. Elliott has shown that "from Cyprian's time, near the middle of the third century, even to the time of the Waldenses in the 12th and 13th centuries, there was kept up by a succession of expositors in the Church, a recognition of the precise year-day principle of interpretation."⁷

Joachim had been dead nearly forty years when Archbishop Eberhardt first enunciated the idea that the Papacy was the little horn of Daniel 7. That was two centuries before John Wycliffe, called the morning star of the Reformation. So it is abundantly clear that this interpretation was not invented by the Reformers to help them pin the name of Antichrist on the pope. They were unable to agree on how it applied, until the time had run out in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Maitland made much of the disagreements among historicist writers who differed not only about the time when the 1260 years began, but also in their lists of the ten kingdoms. He failed to see that by listing writers who disagreed on when the 1260 years began, he exposed the error of his own contention that the year-day theory was invented to make the prophecy suit the pope. Furthermore, if they disagreed about the date when the period began, they must also disagree about which kingdoms existed at that time. When commentators disagree, it may well be because their knowledge of history is deficient. Not all historicists knew when or how the Papacy was established, and not one was aware that two separate kingdoms of Franks, the Ripuarians and the Salians, existed in A.D. 476.

After listing the writers who disagreed on when the saints were given into the hands of the little horn, Maitland ridiculed the Protestant position with a stream of rhetorical questions: "Are the saints of the Most High so ignorant, not only of their own destiny, but of their history, as that they know not when, how, or by whom this tremendous prediction was executed? The delivery of the saints into the hand of their persecutor was surely a solemn act. "We may" says Faber, "naturally conclude that they were given into his hands both by some formal deed, and some specific person." (Vol. I, p.189). And might we not expect that this solemn act of her delivery would be known in her assemblies - registered in her calendar - never, never lost sight of by her members? But instead of this, the saints who were thus delivered up knew nothing of the matter. One generation after another passed away, and the secret was not disclosed." (p.57)

Any ill-informed or unwary reader might well be carried away by these supposedly unanswerable questions. But in 1826, the same year when this was published, all the leading writers on prophecy, with the exception of Faber, met at Albury Park, and agreed on when, how, and by whom the saints had been delivered into the hands of the bishop of Rome, namely in A.D. 533 by decree of the emperor Justinian.

2. Dr. James H. Todd

Under the title *Discourses on the Prophecies relating to Antichrist*, Dr. James H. Todd published, in 1840, a series of lectures delivered in Dublin. In these he sought to uphold the view of the primitive church, that the Bible prophecies speak of a personal Antichrist who is to reign for three years and a half immediately prior to the second coming of Christ. He held that "the opinions entertained by ancient Christian expositors must always be regarded as of great importance." (p.15) He disagreed with Joseph Mede who, in the seventeenth century, thought that the opinions of the early church were bound to be misleading: "We are told in the text," Mede said, "that the words are shut up and the book sealed, even to the time of the end; we cannot therefore expect in ancient writers any satisfactory explanation of these prophecies; we should rather look for the discovery of the true interpretation in modern times." (p.17)

In Mede's opinion, the time prophecies showed that "the time of the end" began about the year 1120, and from about that time the Papacy began to be revealed as the real Antichrist. Todd sought to demolish this position by applying Maitland's condemnation of the year-day interpretation: "The calculation from which Mede has derived his main position, that 'the time of the end', or the coming of Antichrist, began in the twelfth century, depends altogether on the untenable assumption that *days* in prophetic language denote years; an assumption which an eminent living

writer has so completely refuted, that no theory built upon it can now be considered as requiring any further confutation. I shall not detain you by repeating the arguments employed by the writer to whom I allude...The opinion that a day in prophetic language means a year, and a year, three hundred and sixty years, is an arbitrary assumption destitute of any Scriptural evidence." (p.19f)

Now Mede's contention that "the time of the end, or the coming of Antichrist, began in the twelfth century" does not, in fact, depend on the questionable calculations he had put forward to support it. It depends on the teaching of St. Paul that the Man of Sin would appear when the Restraining Power, the Roman empire, was "out of the way", and this was brought about by the Turks in 1072. Mede's faulty calculations, however, provided Todd with an opportunity to make a sweeping condemnation of the year-day principle, without so much as stating any arguments against it - "I shall not detain you" he said, "by repeating the arguments employed by the writer to whom I allude," adding a reference to Maitland's work in a footnote.

In his second lecture Dr. Todd disputed the view that "the fourth kingdom of the prophecy, symbolized by the feet and toes of the image is identical with the Roman empire." He alleged first that "the Romans were remarkable for moderation, for tolerance, and for gentle government of the nations that submitted to their way," which was the reverse of the fourth kingdom as described in the prophecy. (p.83f) He appears to have forgotten their ruthless destruction of Greek civilization, and their treatment of the Jews in A.D. 70 and 135, not to mention others who did not meekly submit to their rule.

He pointed out also that "nothing is more clear than that the fourth kingdom of the prophecy is to fall beneath the stroke of the stone," and asked "In what sense can it be said that the Roman empire owes its fall to Christianity?" (p.55) It had been argued by Mede that the Roman empire is still in existence awaiting the fall of the stone. "The supposition that the Roman empire still exists, and will continue to the coming of the Lord, is necessary to the common interpretation of the fourth kingdom," said Todd. "But to the reader of history no fact seems better attested or more certain, than the Roman monarchy is extinct." (p.69)

That is quite true, but it proves only that the feet and toes of the image upon which alone the stone fell, stand for a phase of history after Rome, the "time of the end", described in Daniel 2: 41-43, separately from the legs in verse 40.

In his third and fourth lectures Dr. Todd sought to show that the prophecy of the little horn in Daniel 8, as well as that of the Wilful King in Daniel 11: 36, describe the same person and events as in Daniel 7, by drawing up a list of similarities. This

line of argument is fallacious, for even if the descriptions of two persons agree exactly in a score of particulars, it requires only one difference to prove conclusively that two different people are involved.

In the early church the little horn of Daniel 8 was usually applied to the career of Antiochus Epiphanes. Since the little horn in Daniel 7 arose from the fourth empire, Rome, while that in chapter 8 appeared in the territory of the third empire, Greece, they could scarcely be regarded as identical.

In his fifth lecture Dr. Todd discussed the Man of Sin sitting in the temple of God. "It is difficult" he said, "to believe that they to whom the Apostle wrote, could have understood the words otherwise than of the literal temple in Jerusalem." (p.217) On the contrary, since Paul invariably used the Greek word *naos* in his letters when speaking of the church as the temple of God, it is unlikely that the Thessalonians would have taken the word to mean anything else. Literally the word means "dwelling-place" of God, and it is significant that after the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom at the time of Christ's death, the word *naos* was never again applied to the temple.

Coming to the Restraining Power, Dr. Todd declared that "What this impediment is, or was, although it seems to have been known to the Thessalonians, has not been preserved in the traditions of the Church." This is not true, as he immediately admits, saying, "The most common opinion was that 'what withholdeth' was the Roman empire, that Antichrist was to arise on the ruins of that empire after its division among ten kings, and that therefore, until the Roman power was at an end, the man of sin could not be revealed." He then concluded that since the Roman empire is now extinct, and no potentate possessing the character and marks of Antichrist has so far been manifested, the Restraining Power could not be the Roman empire, and the matter remains a mystery. (p.238f) But the grotesque picture of Antichrist, which he had conjured up from three quite unrelated prophecies, is nowhere described in Scripture.

3. *John Henry Newman*

It had been Maitland's main contention in his *Attempt to Elucidate the Prophecies concerning Antichrist* (1830), and of Dr. Todd in his *Discourses*, that certain prophecies in chapters 7, 8, and 11 of Daniel, and of St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, and elsewhere, all referred to the same person and events. They appeared to argue that the early church had applied all these prophecies to a future personal Antichrist who was to arise shortly before the second advent, and that the Protestant Reformers were in error in applying any of them to the Papacy. This was the impression made on John Henry Newman, who later went over

to the Roman Church and finally became a cardinal.

Reviewing Dr. Todd's book in the *British Critic* in 1840, he declared it undeniable "that Scripture contains intimations of the coming of a special enemy of Christ and His Church, of great power, craft, and wickedness." He went on to say that "He is described by St. Paul and Daniel in the prophecies which Mr. Todd undertakes to elucidate, as 'the man of sin', 'the lawless one', 'the son of perdition', 'a king of fierce countenance, and of a look more stout than his fellows'." Continuing with a long series of further quotations taken indiscriminately from various chapters of Daniel and Paul's epistles, he concluded "Such is the prophecy as Dr. Todd delineates it; the question is, whether, as he maintains, its fulfilment is yet to come, or whether it has taken place in the person of the Bishop of Rome, as Protestants have very commonly supposed."^{8a}

Now this portrait of the enemy of Christ was largely the creation of Maitland and Todd, for not even the early church had included the little horn of Daniel 8 in its description of Antichrist. But to imply that "Protestants have very commonly supposed" that all these prophecies had been fulfilled in the person of the Bishop of Rome, was utterly misleading. With regard to Daniel 8, some had held the traditional view that the little horn applied to Antiochus Epiphanes, many thought that it was either the Roman empire, or its later Byzantine residue, while increasing numbers took the view that the Mohammedan powers were intended. No one had ever applied it to the Papacy, in fact G.S. Faber had argued that it could not be confused with the papal horn in Daniel 7, because "it would be a monstrous zoological anomaly to describe the same horn as growing upon the heads of two different beasts."^{9a}

As for the Wilful King in Daniel 11: 36, it is true that some had identified this figure with the Man of Sin, but for many years most leading Reformers had applied this part of the prophecy to the eastern, rather than to the western part of the Roman empire. Here again Faber argued forcefully against identifying the Wilful King with Paul's Man of Sin.^{9b} Other Protestant exponents of prophecy, meeting at Albury Park, had expressed the opinion that no explanation of the prophecy had yet received the general consent of the church.

Newman's review was later reproduced under the title *The Protestant Idea of Antichrist* among his *Essays Critical and Historical*. This book was frequently reprinted throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, thus creating the false impression that Protestants generally had long been guilty of twisting every defamatory prophecy they could find in the Bible to make it apply to the pope. In fact, Newman made scathing allegations that historicist writers had been fabricating their evidences, and mis-

leading their readers. "There is no department of theology in which ordinary men are more at the mercy of an author than that of prophetic interpretation," he declared, and claimed that "Mr. Maitland, who is one of the few persons who have undertaken to sift the facts on which the Ultra-Protestant interpreters of the prophecies rely, has at once brought to light so many strange mistakes in their statements as to make a candid reader very suspicious, or rather, utterly incredulous, of all allegations made on the mere authority of these writers."^{8b}

To illustrate how unworthy Protestant authors were to expound Bible prophecy, Newman quoted at length from Thomas Newton's autobiography to show that the Bishop had a liking for home comforts, thoroughly enjoyed his food, and was irritated when domestic worries, such as butchers' and bakers' bills, interfered with his study of the sacred and classic authors. "Who will say that this is the man" asked Newman, "not merely to unchurch, but to smite, to ban, to wither the whole of Christendom for many centuries, and the greater part of it even in his own day?"^{8c} It is difficult to see what Bishop Newton's human weaknesses have to do with his qualifications as an exponent of prophecy. But it is altogether ridiculous to suggest that Protestant views about the Papacy not merely unchurch, but smite, ban and wither the whole of Christendom, or even individual Roman Catholics, many of whom may be good, but sadly misguided Christians. But such was the type of propaganda employed in the nineteenth century to discredit the Reformers' interpretation of prophecy.

4. *False Predictions*

The attacks of Maitland, Todd and Newman were not alone responsible for the rejection of the historicist interpretation. There were other causes, not least being the irresponsible forecasting of events and dates by historicists themselves. When these predictions failed, it brought not only their perpetrators, but the whole year-day principle into disrepute. For example, in 1815 J.H. Frere predicted that "Bonaparte will become emperor of Rome."^{10a} He also forecast that the "destruction of the Roman Empire will terminate in the year 1822, when the Papal and Infidel powers will be destroyed, and the Jews restored to their own land."^{10b} When this failed, it was amended in 1831 so that what had been expected to happen in 1822 was really to happen in 1847. Not unnaturally Maitland took the opportunity to expose and ridicule these forecasts when his *Attempt to Elucidate the Prophecies* was reprinted in 1853.

A more serious case was that of William Miller, father of the American Seventh Day Adventist Movement, who declared in 1818 that "the 2300 year-days, extending from 457 B.C. to about A.D. 1843, will bring the climax of prophecy and of human history; and that Jesus will come 'on or before' the Jewish year '1843'."^{2f} This

was later revised to 1844 when it was realised that a year ought to have been added to allow for there being no zero year. But the fallacy in this theory was Miller's original assumption that the 2300 days began with the Seventy Weeks; there is no Scriptural reason for thinking this. But his manipulations and subsequent attempts to uphold false dates served to bring discredit not only on his own movement, but on the whole historicist application of the year-day principle.

Modern Futurists

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century there arose the Tractarian Movement led by such men as J.H. Newman and E.B. Pusey, who adopted the current Roman Catholic idea, shared by many Protestants, of a future personal Antichrist. In Tract No.83 it was conceded that "He that withholdeth or letteth (2 Thess. 2: 7) means the power of Rome, for all the ancient writers so speak of it." But since it was held that the Man of Sin had not yet appeared, Rome must still exist: "I do not grant that the Roman empire is gone. Far from it; the Roman empire remains even to this day." (p.5)

Pusey held that the two legs of the image denoted the divisions of the empire into East and West, but later Keil dropped this idea. The ten kingdoms, at first regarded as future, are thought by more recent writers, such as E.J. Young, to symbolize the nations of modern Europe. Some, contrary to Dr. Todd, still think the Roman empire exists in some form, or will be revived, and will continue to exist until the personal Antichrist appears.

1. *Dispensationalism*

A system of interpretation referred to as dispensationalism was developed by J.N. Darby at a series of annual conferences in the home of Lady Powerscourt in Ireland. The characteristic features of this system are a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel, and a secret rapture of the church. In the absence of the historicist exponents who had earlier met at Albury, the Rev. R. Daly, rector of Powerscourt, put forward the view, which at that time few believed, that the 1260 prophetic days should be taken literally, and that there was going to be a personal Antichrist. But owing to "great differences of opinion upon what appeared to be fundamental points of doctrine" Daly subsequently refused to take part in any further conferences^{11a} which became more and more dominated by J.N. Darby and members of the Brethren Movement.

According to the dispensational theory, the present Christian dispensation, extending from the Crucifixion to the "rapture of the church", falls as a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth

of Daniel's weeks. "During this long interval" wrote B.W. Newton, "all *detailed* history respecting both Israel and the nations is suspended, not only in Daniel but in all Scriptures."^{12a}

This theory had been put forward by William Burgh of Dublin in a series of *Lectures on the Second Advent* published as a book in 1832. It is significant that G.V. Wigram, who had been associated with Burgh at that time,^{11b} attended the Powerscourt conferences, and became closely connected with J.N. Darby. The greater part of Burgh's book was devoted to advancing the idea of a personal Antichrist, and we may suppose that it had been this newly published book that was discussed at the second Powerscourt conference in September 1832.

As most of the special features of modern dispensational teaching are to be found in Burgh's *Lectures on the Second Advent*, it is interesting to notice that he claims to have originated them. In his Preface he says, "The interpretation given in these pages is so materially different from that which generally obtains, and which has the sanction of so many eminent and learned men, that an apology for presenting it is, I feel, almost called for" (p.iii). He agrees, however, with Maitland that these ideas about Antichrist "were held, in substance, by all Christian writers for the first twelve centuries, which is at least an answer to any objection that may be raised on the ground of novelty" (p.vi).

It was claimed not only by Burgh, but later by other dispensationists, that their teaching was derived from that of the early church. But he had introduced a number of novel features, and others were added at the Powerscourt conferences, which were either wholly unknown to the early fathers, or were held by only a minority of them. In particular they would have rejected the notion that a gap of indeterminate length was to intervene between the sixty-ninth and seventieth of Daniel's weeks. Burgh declared this "to have been the opinion of the ancient fathers as, for instance, Irenaeus, Julius Africanus, Hippolytus the martyr, and Apollinarius" (p.153).

This is not true, for Julius Africanus reckoned the whole seventy weeks to run consecutively as lunar years, equivalent to 475 solar years, from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes to A.D. 31, which he took to be the date of the Crucifixion.^{2g} Eusebius placed the Crucifixion in the middle of the last week with the latter half extending three-and-a-half years beyond it.^{2h} As for Apollinarius, cited by Burgh, Jerome actually quotes him as saying that "it is impossible that periods so linked together be wrenched apart, but rather the time-segments must all be joined together in conformity with Daniel's prophecy."^{1b} Irenaeus, did, in fact, equate the last half week with the three-and-a-half reign of Antichrist, and Hippolytus referred the whole of the week to the time of Antichrist,^{2j} but these were exceptions.

Quite contrary to the teaching of the early church was Burgh's opinion (p.148) that the Six Items of the Atonement in Daniel 9: 24, "in their application to the Jewish nations, must be referred to another time than the First Advent." It was the unanimous opinion of the early fathers that these basic Items had been fully accomplished by our Lord in His life and death on the cross. Tertullian, in his *Answer to the Jews*, (xxvi), plainly declared that all six were fulfilled by Christ, and Hippolytus, in his Commentary on Daniel (15-17), does the same. Eusebius, in his *Proof of the Gospel* (VIII,11) devotes several pages to demonstrating each point, and concludes "All these things were fulfilled when the seventy weeks were completed at the date of our Saviour's Coming," and he quotes Julius Africanus to the same effect. Yet many futurists continue to assert that the prophecy was not fulfilled at the First Advent, but remains to be fulfilled at the end of a suspended seventieth week.

By accepting the theory of the early fathers, that the Anti-christ would arise out of a ten-fold division of the Roman empire, the futurists inherited a prediction that failed to materialise. In order to patch it up, B.W. Newton adopted the Jesuit explanation devised by Cardinal Bellarmine that the two legs of the image denoted the eastern and western sectors of the empire.^{12b} But since that theory was discredited when the Holy Roman Empire came to an end, the Brethren were obliged to assume, contrary to historical fact, that the Roman empire is still in existence, or that there is a gap between the legs and feet of the image, after which the Roman empire is to be revived in its ten-toed condition.

2. *The Secret Rapture*

The other outstanding feature of dispensationalism is the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. The theory developed at the Powerscourt Conferences, and accepted today by a large number of evangelical Christians, is that the Christian church is to escape the tribulation of the last days, by being "caught up... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4: 17), and will remain there until all the trouble is over, when they will return with the Lord to establish the kingdom of God.

Many Scripture passages are quoted both for and against such a theory, but we cannot go into them here. They have been discussed by S.P. Tregelles in *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, and by O.T. Allis in *Prophecy and the Church* (1945). (Also by A.A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (1979)).

Robert Govett, in a sizeable work, *The Saints' Rapture to the Presence of the Lord Jesus* (Norwich, 1852), argued that not all the church will be taken, but only Christians counted worthy. He suggested that the "Restraining Power" (2 Thess. 2: 7) which prevents the manifestation of the "Man of Sin" is not the Roman.

Empire, but this company of the faithful which will "be taken out of the way." Our concern, however, is with the origin and development of the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture (i.e. of all the church) which, according to Tregelles, was first given as a prophetic 'utterance' in Edward Irving's notoriously be-devilled Pentecostal Church.

This may well be true, for the earliest known statement of it is in an article signed T.W.C. in Irving's journal *The Morning Watch* (Vol.2, 1830, p.587-593). There it was suggested that the Sign of the Son of Man in Matthew 24: 30 is the taking up of the saints to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4: 17), and that this is to occur some time before His advent with His saints. (see also Vol.5, p.306 ff, and Vol.6, p.18 ff, both 1832).

Robert Baxter, at one time a member of Irving's church, records in his *Narrative of Facts* (1833) how this theme was developed by giving to various Scriptures a new meaning never before suggested by anyone. He confesses how he himself had, in January 1832, under the influence of a spirit power, expounded Revelation 11 in such a way as to imply that "at the end of three years and a half from the beginning of the prophecy of the witnesses, God would take away His Spirit and His church altogether from the earth, by causing His faithful spiritual church to be caught up to heaven like Elijah," after which Satan would appear as the Man of Sin, and rule the earth in hideous power (p.31).

In his *Origin of the Brethren* (1967), H.H. Rowdon draws attention to Irvingite influence on J.N. Darby and the Powers-court Conference on prophecy in 1832 (p.79). Darby may have imagined his ideas on the secret rapture were his own, but it is evident they were already circulating in Irving's church. In fact Capt. P.F. Hall, an Irvingite, had tried to foist the idea on the Plymouth Brethren at the end of 1831, when it was rejected by B.W. Newton.^{11c}

In view of this background, it may seem strange that such an interpretation of prophecy should now be accepted by so many evangelical churches on both sides of the Atlantic. Its propagation has been briefly explained by O.T. Allis (1945, p.13f.), and more recently by E.R. Sandeen in *Roots of Fundamentalism* (1970). In 1859 Darby visited Canada and the United States. Three years later a monthly journal, *Waymarks in the Wilderness*, began disseminating his teaching among the American Brethren, and this was followed, about 1870, by the publication of *Maranatha* by James H. Brookes, who held similar views, and attended a series of Prophetic Conferences from 1878 onwards in New York. In that year also, W.E. Blackstone's *Jesus is Coming* was first published. Little notice was taken of it until 1908, when the futurist theory was given world-wide publicity by the distribution, gratis, of several hundred thousand copies of *Jesus is Coming* to Christian

workers throughout the world. Then in 1909 the *Scofield Reference Bible* was published, followed by revised editions in 1917 and 1967. In this Bible marginal notes appear alongside the inspired text, thus giving them an air of authenticity, but in fact they expound the views of the Brethren Movement.

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